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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002070

SIPDIS

NSC FOR KELLY MAGSAMEN AND PUNEET TALWAR

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: ISCI/BADR OFFICIALS ON IRANIAN ELECTION, MEK, AND  
IRAQ'S TIES WITH TEHRAN

REF: BAGHDAD 2059

BAGHDAD 00002070 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: CDA Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

(C) Summary: During an introductory meeting with Post's new Iran Watcher (IW), senior ISCI/Badr officials made the following points about Iran and Iraq-Iran relations: (1) the Iranian election and its violent aftermath were unexpected and likely to result in new political accommodations between the government and opposition; (2) despite their differences, Iran's political leaders remain committed to the ideals of the revolution; (3) Iraq's ties with Iran are natural and long-standing given a shared Shia heritage; and (4) the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) must be dealt with conclusively for the sake of Iraqi and regional stability. End summary.

¶1. (C) On August 1, Post's IW and Poloff met with Tahsin al-Azzawi, deputy chairman of the Badr Organization and member of parliament, and Haitham al-Husseini, Senior Advisor and personal aide to ISCI Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakim. The ensuing discussion covered post-election developments in Iran; Iraq's bilateral ties with Iran; and the recent GOI crackdown on the MEK in Camp Ashraf.

Iranian Election: Accommodation Likely  
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¶2. (C) Azzawi noted that the scale of public discontent and support for Moussavi, which he acknowledged as "mere thousands but millions,"<sup>8</sup> was not easy to dismiss and had forced the Iranian government to confront harsh new political realities. Supreme Leader Khamenei's efforts aimed to defuse the crisis were scorned by the opposition as impartial and biased in favor of Ahmadinejad. Citing concern about the legitimacy of the election and its impact on the new government, Azzawi and Husseini said that the Iranian leadership would have to learn to accommodate the different camps. The Iranian government will "have no choice but to change its outlook to accommodate internal pressures," Azzawi predicted.

¶3. (C) Intended to convey a cautionary message to the USG, Azzawi underscored that "despite their differences, Moussavi, Ahmadinejad, Karroubi, and others are still true believers in the Islamic revolution given their long history."<sup>8</sup> Responding to IW's point that the USG was wrongfully accused of trying to foment a velvet revolution, Azzawi said that "the Iranians were looking for fingerprints to blame others (U.S. and UK) and rally public support against foreign interference."<sup>8</sup> "Al-Hurra's pro-Moussavi coverage did not help your case,"<sup>8</sup> he stated, jokingly referring to the USG-funded media outlet. "We cannot afford

instability in Iran. It is not good for Iraq or the region,<sup>8</sup> Azzawi cautioned.

#### Iraq-Iran: A Natural Relationship

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¶4. (C) Asked about the future of Iran-Iraq relations, Azzawi and Hussein affirmed that bilateral ties between the two countries are &natural and long-standing<sup>8</sup> and would continue to be reinforced through a shared Shia heritage. Most of Shia Islam's important shrines are in Iraq, they pointed out, therefore cultural linkages to the east are natural. IW noted that some of Iraq's Arab neighbors accuse Baghdad of being too close to Tehran. Azzawi blamed Iraq,s Arab neighbors for misconstruing Iraq,s ties to Iran as anti-Arab. &Iraq is like a bouquet of different religions, ethnicities, and tribes each being courted by various powers,<sup>8</sup> he explained. &We want regional stability and Qpowers,<sup>8</sup> he explained. &We want regional stability and friendly relations with all our neighbors and this bothers some of our Arab friends.<sup>8</sup>

#### MEK: Enemies of Iraq

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¶5. (C) Regarding the recent GOI crackdown on the MEK in Ashraf (Note: The GOI has officially renamed Ashraf the "Camp of New Iraq." End Note.) Azzawi, echoing the GOI Interior Ministry, exclaimed that &the MEK file must be resolved once and for all.<sup>8</sup> Pointing to the dark days of the MEK,s alliance with Saddam during the Iraq-Iran war, Azzawi explained that the MEK, along with the PKK, are enemies of the Iraqi people. "The Iranians think you are using the MEK and they accuse our intelligence ministry of doing so as well.<sup>8</sup> (Note: The Iranian accusation against the GOI is likely tied to Iranian suspicions of Baathist remnants

BAGHDAD 00002070 002 OF 002

working in the Iraqi intelligence ministry. End Note.)

¶6. (C) According to Azzawi, a recent meeting between Iraqi's National Security Advisor Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie and a group of eight MEK defectors revealed the workings of an organization unwilling to accommodate dissent and defection. Azzawi criticized the MEK for their stubbornness and unwillingness to compromise and relocate to an alternative location, farther from the Iranian border. Regarding a possible return to Iran, Azzawi said that the Iranian government has never objected to their return and is only interested in prosecuting a select few in the party leadership. "No other country has offered to accept them as refugees," Azzawi commented. &The Iraqi people cannot understand why they are still here.<sup>8</sup> He added that it was unnatural for any country to have within its borders an organization plotting attacks on neighboring states. &We are now being accused of wrong doing and so are you,<sup>8</sup> he noted in reference to media reports criticizing the GOI crackdown on Ashraf (see reftel for latest update).

#### Al-Hakim's Health

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¶7. (C) Hussein commented that ISCI Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakim "was doing better" following another round of lung cancer treatment in Tehran and left the hospital weeks ago. Over the last several weeks, Iraqi officials have traveled to Tehran to pay their final respects to the ailing al-Hakim in anticipation of his death. (Note: Al-Hakim's son, Sayyid Ammar, is expected to succeed him. End Note.)

COMMENT

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(C) The meeting was conducted in an ISCI house close to the Embassy in Baghdad's International Zone (IZ). Both men were cordial and at ease during the conversation, at times punctuated by light-hearted exchanges in Farsi. Azzawi did

most of the talking (in Arabic) given his seniority in the ISCI/Badr organization. Both men have close personal and political ties to Iran, having resided there for many years (20 years in Azzawi's case). They spared no effort in reaffirming ISCI's close ties to the USG and the value placed in nurturing the relationship. Azzawi's cautionary point about the commitment of Iran's leaders to the revolution despite internal squabbles was intended to dispel any misgivings about the staying power of the regime or its ideology. Their views on the MEK reflect the GOI's distaste for the organization and the political liability it presents for Iraq-Iran relations. End comment.

FORD